

MAINE POOLED PCR TESTING

What is it?

Maine's Pooled Testing program for private and public schools is a voluntary, weekly PCR testing program for both staff and students. Pooled testing involves mixing together several test samples together in a "batch" or "pool" and then testing the pooled sample with a PCR test for detection of SARS-CoV-2.

If a pooled test result is negative, then all individuals within that pool are presumed negative and may remain in school. If a pooled test result is positive, then all individuals in the pool must be retested individually. The rapid point-of-care antigen test will be the primary source of this individual follow-up testing.

Sample Weekly Testing Schedule

Day*	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Test Type	Pooled PCR samples are collected	Results from pooled PCR testing returns in 24-48 hours		Antigen testing	Second round of antigen testing, if needed
Action	Pooled samples are delivered to lab for processing.	If a positive PCR test returns from a pool, then antigen testing is performed on those who were in the pool the same or next day.		If a positive case is identified using rapid antigen, then the case leaves school and isolates. Initiate SOP. Other pooled participants return to class.	This will only occur if the first round of antigen testing did not detect a positive case. All students will remain in school if the second round does not identify a positive case and no further testing will occur until the next designated pooled PCR testing day.
*Schools will have a designated day to perform pooled testing, but not every schools pooled testing day will be Monday.					

Testing will be performed in either a common area (gymnasium/cafeteria/etc.) or in the classroom, depending on the makeup of each "pool". Typically, testing a group of over 100 volunteers takes less than 1 hour. The PCR test is a "shallow" nose swab, allowing students as young as grade 2 to perform the test individually. Swabs are batched together in a PCR

test and shipped to the lab. Results return between 24-48 hours, and positive pools will be individually tested to determine the positive individual.

Does the entire student body need to participate?

Though we strongly encourage it, pooled testing is voluntary, and students must be enrolled via the appropriate paperwork.

Will the school provide support to those individuals who are in need of special services who choose to opt-in?

Yes, the school will provide any support needed.

What are the benefits of pooled testing?

1. Regular PCR testing allows schools to detect asymptomatic individuals early, with the goal of preventing further infections and outbreaks.
2. Close contacts in the school setting who are enrolled in the pooled testing program, in most situations, are allowed to continue coming to school and participating in after school programming such as athletics and music.
3. Regular PCR testing is free to those enrolled.

Why are close contacts that have enrolled in pooled testing allowed in school and school activities?

Individuals participating in the testing program are tested every week with a PCR test, which allows the school to monitor those individuals closely, even after they have been identified as a close contact. The PCR test also provides the opportunity to catch the virus at low levels in an asymptomatic individual.

Do pooled testing participants need to quarantine while they await the results of their regularly scheduled PCR test?

No, students and staff will continue their usual school day unless they are symptomatic. Should a pool test positive, members of that pool will return to school and immediately engage in follow-up testing.

What are the options if follow-up testing for positive pool members are all negative?

If this occurs, the school will conduct a second follow-up test on all individuals no sooner than the next day, but within 2 days. If those tests are all negative, then the school would proceed with the next round of scheduled pooled testing PCR testing. Members of a positive pool do not have to quarantine prior to receiving the results of their follow-up test, unless they are symptomatic. Similarly, household contacts of individuals in a positive pool do not need to quarantine, unless the individual is confirmed to have COVID-19 through follow-up testing.

What if a pool comes back with an “Unstable” or “Indeterminate” result?

DHHS recommends re-testing as soon as possible in either case – either by re-pooling immediately or by follow-up testing the members of the pool individually.

Can a parent of a child not participating in the testing program have their child tested to get out of quarantine and return to school?

The school will not accept a one-time test to get out of quarantine. The student placed in quarantine was not tested at the time the positive case was identified, nor would they be tested each week moving forward; thus, a one-time test is not helpful in monitoring the student.

Should household members of individuals in a positive pool be considered “possibly exposed” while waiting for follow-up testing to be completed?

No. Members of a positive pool do not have to quarantine prior to receiving the results of their follow-up tests unless they are symptomatic. Similarly, household contacts of individuals in a positive pool do not need to quarantine unless the individual is confirmed to have COVID-19 through follow up testing.